

CLAIMS:

1. A method for processing hatchlings, the method comprising:  
loading a hatchling into each hatchling carrier of a plurality of hatchling carriers to  
5 provide a plurality of loaded hatchling carriers, wherein each loaded hatchling carrier is  
capable of restraining only one hatchling at a time;  
determining a processing sequence in a processing system comprising a plurality of  
processing stations for each loaded hatchling carrier, wherein determining the processing  
sequence comprises selecting two or more of the processing stations at which the hatchling  
10 will undergo processing;  
processing each hatchling in each of the loaded hatchling carriers in the two or  
more selected processing stations of the processing sequence; and  
transporting each loaded hatchling carrier between the two or more processing  
stations using an automated conveying system connecting the plurality of processing  
15 stations;  
wherein each hatchling carrier comprises an identification tag associated therewith;  
and wherein the processing sequences for two or more of the loaded hatchling  
carriers are different.
- 20 2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the plurality of processing stations  
comprises at least one data collection station at which hatchling data is collected and at  
least one functional station at which the hatchling is changed, and further wherein selecting  
two or more of the processing stations at which the hatchling will undergo processing  
comprises selecting at least one data collection station and at least one functional station.  
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3. A method according to claim 1, further comprising assigning the identification tag to  
each hatchling carrier.

4. A method according to claim 1, further comprising assigning the identification tag to the hatchling carrier after loading the hatchling carrier, wherein at least a portion of the identification tag is based on a characteristic of the hatchling in the loaded hatchling carrier.
- 5 5. A method according to claim 1, wherein determining the processing sequence for each hatchling in each loaded hatchling carriers comprises selecting the two or more processing stations at which the hatchling will undergo processing before processing the hatchling at any of the selected processing stations of the processing sequence.
- 10 6. A method according to claim 1, wherein determining the processing sequence for each hatchling in each loaded hatchling carriers comprises selecting at least one of the two or more processing stations at which the hatchling will undergo processing after processing the hatchling in at least one of the two or more processing stations of the processing sequence.
- 15 7. A method according to claim 1, wherein the transporting comprises transporting each loaded hatchling carrier only to the selected two or more processing stations of the processing sequence for the loaded hatchling carrier.
- 20 8. A method according to claim 1, wherein the transporting comprises transporting each loaded hatchling carrier through all of the processing stations of the plurality of processing stations, and further wherein each loaded hatchling carrier is processed only at the selected two or more processing stations of the processing sequence for that loaded hatchling carrier.
- 25 9. A method according to claim 1, further comprising identifying a characteristic of each hatchling in the loaded hatchling carriers, wherein determining the processing

- sequence is at least partially based on the identified characteristic of the hatchling in the loaded hatchling carrier.
10. A method according to claim 9, wherein the identified characteristic comprises  
5 species or breed of the hatchling.
11. A method according to claim 9, wherein the identified characteristic comprises weight of the hatchling.
- 10 12. A method according to claim 9, wherein the identified characteristic comprises gender of the hatchling.
13. A method according to claim 1, further comprising storing information related each hatchling in each of the loaded hatchling carriers in a database.  
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14. A method according to claim 13, wherein the information comprises the identification tag.
15. A method according to claim 13, wherein the information comprises an image of  
20 the hatchling in each of the loaded hatchling carriers.
16. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises a cleaning station.
- 25 17. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises a weighing station.

18. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises a sexing station.
19. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises a beak treatment station.
20. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises a claw treatment station.
21. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises an imaging station.
22. A method according to claim 1, wherein a processing station of the plurality of processing stations comprises a holding station.
23. A method for processing hatchlings, the method comprising:  
loading a hatchling into each hatchling carrier of a plurality of hatchling carriers to provide a plurality of loaded hatchling carriers, wherein each loaded hatchling carrier is capable of restraining only one hatchling at a time;  
assigning an identification tag to each hatchling carrier;  
determining a processing sequence in a processing system comprising a plurality of processing stations for each loaded hatchling carrier, wherein determining the processing sequence comprises selecting two or more of the processing stations at which the hatchling will undergo processing, wherein the plurality of processing stations comprises at least one data collection station at which hatchling data is collected and at least one functional station at which the hatchling is changed, and further wherein selecting two or more of the processing stations at which the hatchling will undergo processing comprises selecting at least one data collection station and at least one functional station;

- identifying a characteristic of each hatchling in the loaded hatchling carriers, wherein determining the processing sequence is at least partially based on the identified characteristic of the hatchling in the loaded hatchling carrier;
- processing each hatchling in each of the loaded hatchling carriers in the two or more selected processing stations of the processing sequence; and
- transporting each loaded hatchling carrier between the two or more processing stations using an automated conveying system connecting the plurality of processing stations;
- wherein the processing sequences for two or more of the loaded hatchling carriers are different.
24. An automated hatchling processing system comprising:
- a plurality of processing stations comprising at least one data collection station capable of collecting data regarding a hatchling and at least one functional station capable of changing the hatchling;
- an automated conveying system connecting the plurality of processing stations;
- a plurality of hatchling carriers adapted to travel along the automated conveying system between the plurality of processing stations, wherein each hatchling carrier is capable of restraining only one hatchling at a time;
- an identification tag associated with each hatchling carrier of the plurality of hatchling carriers; and
- a control system operatively connected to the automated conveying system and the plurality of processing stations, the control system routing the plurality of hatchling carriers along the automated conveying system and activating the plurality of processing stations as needed.
25. A system according to claim 24, wherein the plurality of processing stations comprises a weighing station, a beak treatment station, and a claw treatment station.

26. A system according to claim 24, wherein control system comprises a central controller controlling the automated conveying system and the plurality of processing stations.
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27. A system according to claim 24, wherein the control system comprises a distributed control system comprising two or more computing elements controlling different components of the automated hatchling processing system.
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28. A system according to claim 24, wherein the automated conveying system connects one or more of the processing stations in a parallel configuration.
29. A system according to claim 24, wherein the automated conveying system connects the one or more of the processing stations in a serial configuration.
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30. A system according to claim 24, wherein one or more of the processing stations comprises two or more bays.